HARAMBEE

FLAME

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HARAMBEE AFRIKAN CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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HARAMBEE AFRIKAN CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

CREED

Together we seek to know that which is us, to expand our collective consciousness of who we are and whence we come. We exalt in the fact that Afrikans are beautiful in our own right rather than at the expense of any other ethnic group. And in the true spirit of the Swahili word, "harambee," we promote the idea that cultural exchange is germane to human growth.

Wynton Marselis, Luther Campbell: An Artist And A Businessman

Wynton and Luther are two folks who have some things in common: they are both African men, are both performers, and both are renowned in their respective fields. But though they have some things in common, they stand a veritable eternity apart in the music arena.

Wynton is not only a person who can play music. He is, in fact, an artist. In other words, he creates, uses his imagination. In addition, he has sufficiently learned the techniques of blowing the trumpet and achieved a level of theoretical understanding of music such that he can execute with his horn what he imagines in his mind and feels in his soul. As a musician, Wynton has studied under masters and honed both his skill and his artistry so that it can be seriously said that he has become a master, himself. And though Wynton apparently either does not really see himself as an African or sees himself as less an African than a "black American," his path of growth as an artist/musician has been a traditional African path.

In traditional African societies, a person who aspired to be, for example, a master drummer would study under the eye of a master drummer and would learn the traditions - and the history of those traditions - of drumming. In addition, that person would learn and come to an understanding of the societal context in which the drumming occurs and the spiritual and other forces from which drumming derived its essential power.

Further, as one who seeks to be truly a master of his instrument, Wynton Marselis seeks to give to his listeners beauty and to make music that has greatness, music that gives honor and proper tribute to the African-American classical music legacy.

What, then, about Luther Campbell, the leader of

the much-in-the-news rap group, Two Live Crew? Obviously, at least as a performer in the Crew, Luther does not play an instrument; so the question of mastery of an instrument does not apply. As far as we know, he does not sing; so, clearly, we can't make a value judgement about his voice as we would about the voices of Anita Baker, Take Six, or Bobby McFerrin, for example. Luther purports to be a rapper, which means that the relevant questions for us to ask are: how skilled is he in assembling words and phrases and how imaginative is he in expressing ideas or in the manner in which he expresses ideas.

In African-American classical music(so-called "jazz"), it is relatively easy to attempt to make value judgements about a musician's skill and artistry because this music has a tradition that goes back approximately three quarters of a century. Rap, at least in its current form(with instrumental background), hasn't been around long. On the other hand, if we go back in time to the "Dolemite" and "Signifying Monkey" stories, there is a kind of pre-rap legacy. This pre-rap legacy is characterized by humor and clever use of words and smart turn of phrase.

If we examine current rap, we often find this cleverness. And, of course, we often don't. In some instances, we find rap as poetry. Thirdly, there is the question of the music that gives raps particular kinds of flavor. And, lastly, but not least importantly, there is the matter of the messages delivered by raps. When all of the above aspects of rap are considered, it may be that Public Enemy stands at the top of the rap stack. The group's raps are witty and imaginative, as are the music (often with passages of speeches or other sounds dubbed in); the messages are generally of social, cultural, or political relevance to African people; and, frequently, the raps are actually poetic.

Two Live Crew, on the other hand manifests neither

wit nor humor in its raps. And instead of delivering messages of significance to African people, the Crew specializes in demeaning African people, our women in particular. And the instrumental backgrounds it employs, like those of many of the popular rap groups, display practically nothing in the way of innovation.

Despite the above, Two Live Crew has monster record sales, sales that Wynton Marselis could never, even in a most wild stretch of fantasy, hope to achieve. But we have to remind ourselves of where we live and the nature of this place. This is, of course, America, the land of the denim jeans that are taken out by the river and blasted with shotguns and then taken to boutiques, where people actually purchase them for around $80 a pair. This is the land of fads, of mass-produced and media-hyped mediocrity, of sex and the female body as marketing lures for practically every kind of product.

The U.S. has reached a point in its social evolution where the capitalism-spawned desire for financial profit and material symbols of economic affluence has become so pervasive and intense that the proposition that anything or anyone can be a saleable commodity is an acceptable idea to a lot of people in this society. Under this set of circumstances, musicians and other persons in artistic fields frequently foresake artistic integrity for marketability, allow the importance of what they produce to be trivialized for commercial purposes, ignore the needs and interests of the people they represent(in the sense, for example, of Arsenio Hall representing African people through his own African heritage but trivializing an important concern of ours for the sake of some hoots and hollers), and otherwise sell out.

The kind of "music" that Two Live Crew produces and the popularity of that group are symptomatic of the American anyone-and-anything-for-sale ment-

(Cont. on p. 13)

Letter

Listen up, my brother, my African brother. It's time that we correct a wrong. We've been dogging, disrespecting, degrading and neglecting our precious African sisters for far too long! Do you not think anyone is capable of seeing through your scheme to deny your blackness by camouflaging it with the presence of that white woman? Or aren't we even supposed to notice?

And then, as if having her isn't enough, there you are, parading her(Miss Ivory White) up and down, back and forth, in front of your African sisters/ our African Sisters...as if they don't deserve any more respect than you are giving her!

Or, by chance, could it be that you are just trying to give that white woman the impression that it is she and her whiteness which you prefer, when, in your heart, it really isn't?

While, little as you might know, through your lack of common sense, inconsiderateness, or just pure stupidity, the action you are displaying is undeniably conveying just the opposite message to our African sisters/our disappointed African sisters!

And that's why you must listen up, my brother, my African brother, when I tell you that this madness must stop!

What I can't seem to understand is: if a white woman can recognize the beauty of our blackness, why can't we?

-Sammie Dee Smith

FLAME Editorial Policy

The HARAMBEE FLAME, the monthly publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization(parent chapter of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, Inc.), is a pan-Africanist newsletter. The FLAME's priority, with respect to news and views, is African people, events and developments which affect us and are, or should be, of concern to us. The FLAME does not recognize any distinctions between African people based solely on place of birth. References in the FLAME to African people are made on the basis of our common ancestry. An exception to this is the reprinting of articles, or excerpts thereof, from other publications, in which cases we do not alter "black" or other terms designating African people. This is our practice because we do not wish to diminish the integrity and authenticity of the articles we excerpt from.

Articles contained in the FLAME do not necessarily represent the official positions of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization unless they are accompanied by a statement identifying the views as being those of the organization. Generally speaking, all unsigned articles are by the editor, Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa(p.k.a. David Rice).

We encourage you to submit articles to the FLAME. Please enclose with your submission a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should not exceed 900 words, though longer pieces will not be automatically rejected. Short stories are subject to the same restriction with respect to length. We also welcome poetry and graphics. We are looking for poems which address African folks' lives, the conditions we face, and our struggles to rise above those things which hinder us. We are <u>not</u> looking for poems which sacrifice power and beauty for the sake of uniform rhythm and/or rhyme. Send submissions to the editor c/o HARAMBEE FLAME; P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, NE; 68502-0500.

From Other Sources

INNOVATION KEY TO SUCCESS OF ALGEBRA PROJECT

"In many ways, algebra marks the dividing line between those students on a college track and those on a 'vocational' track...

"It was in the spirt of countering the basically undemocratic and unfair nature of this tracking system that the Algebra Project was launched in the early 1980s. Its aim was to universalize the teaching of algebra and make it accessible to the majority of inner-city students who could be denied that access under current conditions.

"The founder of the project, Robert Moses, came to Chicago recently and held a series of demonstration meetings for teachers, administrators, parents and community activists...

"Moses has developed a new approach to teaching algebra to students regardless of their prior level of skill development or academic achievement...

"Moses' method begins with real-life relationships and the experiences students have already developed themselves by the time they reach the middle grades...

"The method takes a common part of city life, for example, the Chicago Transportation Authority, and uses a field trip to set up a frame of reference for learning algebraic concepts...

"While the physical event, the trip, is the first step in the five-step process, the students soon move to a model or picture of the

transportation system, complete with directions, numbers of stops and street numbers. Then there is the collective process of talking about the trip,...bringing to the process such concepts as 'equality' vs. 'equivalence' and 'displacement' that are basic to the next step of symbolic representation.

"The project takes algebra out of the realm of alien symbols and fills it with values, such as soccial good and linking school and community. Moses believes that students should gain a relationship with the transportation system, learn to use it and respect it and help take care of it because 'it is ours'...

"Learning algebra in this way becomes a collective effort as students engage each other, exchange stories and pictures of the trip and together develop language and symbols...

"Some people, impressed by Moses' method, correctly realized it could well be applied to all curricula, not just algebra. Literacy drives in New York have been linked to community-organizing projects, and programs like the Foxfire Project(in Appalacia) share much of the Algebra Project's student-centered orientation in the areas of social science and reading..."

-From "Is Learning Algebra A Civil Right," which appears on page 4 of the 10/31/90 THE GUARDIAN(N.Y.)

AFRICAN YOUTH IN NEW YORK: IMPRISONED GENERATION

"A recent statewide study indicates that New York is creating an 'imprisoned generation' of African-Americans and Latino young men...

"Key findings in the study conducted by the Correctional Association of New York and the New York

State Coalition for Criminal Justice note that young African-American men are over 23 times more likely to be jailed than white men...

"On a given day, the report continued, one in four young African-American men is under the control of New York's criminal justic system...two times more than all full-time Black male college enrollees in the State.

"The report, titled, 'Imprisoned Generation', noted that New York's jail population has gone from 12,500 in 1973 to more than 54,000 today. Some 82 percent inmates, according to the data, are African-American or Latino.

"According to the report, 48 percent of young minority male offenders are in jail with 16 percent of young white offenders are on misdemeanor probation, but only 18 percent are in jail, the study shows...

"The report also reveals that the State has dramatically shifted government priorities to support prison expansion.

"For example, the study said that the State recently authorized the Urban Development Corporation, originally formed to finance housing for poor people, to issue $2. billion in bonds for new prison construction..."

-From "Black Youth, An Imprisoned Generation," which appears on pages 3 and 38 of the Oct. 13 NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS

AFRICAN ECONOMIES AFFECTED BY STAND-OFF IN PERSIAN GULF

..."Now that the gulf crisis has sent oil prices soaring, Sierra Leone and most other African nations face economic devastation...

"...the same problems of debt and low commodity prices that made Africa's problems so intractable are to be exacerbated by reduced demand for African products, as higher fuel prices bite into other countries' economies. There will, in turn, be less hard currency than ever to pay interest on the $250 billion African debt and to buy higher-priced fuel. And because they do not have the money to buy in quantity in advance, oil will cost African nations more than it does developed countries.

"The funds to import petroleum products will be drawn from accounts earmarked for imports for development purposes. Food and other goods shipped by truck will become more expensive. Kerosene, the preferred cooking fuel in many places, will also go up, leaving many with no choice but to cut trees--causing erosion in some areas and hastening desertification in others...

"Even Africa's oil-producing states are not in good shape. Nigeria's Western creditors are toughening their stance, rescheduling its $32 billion debt(Africa's largest) in anticipation of its unbudgeted oil profits. And, like its less fortunate neighbors, Nigeria can expect lower sales of cocoa and other commodities...

"Should the crisis wear on past the expiration of fixed-price quarterly contracts, the smaller sub-Saharan producers--such as Cameroon, Gabon and Congo--might see modest gains. In Angola, where U.S. companies pump oil, the CIA-backed Unita rebels have been attacking oil pipelines..."

-From "Oil Price Shocks Slam Sub-Saharan Africa," which appears on page 4 of the Oct. 24 THE GUARDIAN(N.Y., N.Y.)

BOOKS

Each year, in the months of November and December, African people in this country spend many millions of dollars on toys, clothes, foodstuffs, etc. in celebration of Thanksgiving and Christmas. This time around, before you spend even one dime in celebration of these holidays, read AFRIKAN PEOPLE AND EUROPEAN HOLIDAYS: A MENTAL GENOCIDE by Rev. Ishakamusa Barashango. This book provides some very interesting, and what some people would consider "startling," historical information regarding the origins of Thanksgiving and Christmas. The book also contains provocative commentary on these two European holidays and other historical matters and issues and features an important section on Kwanzaa.

The following passages from this work are offered to give you some sense of its potency.

Controversy Over the Birthday Of Jesus Christ

"...the date December 25 was commemorated in the ancient world long before Jesus was born, as the birthdate of Horus in Egypt...Horus, one of the many Ethiopian manifestations of the sun, was the halo wearing son of Isis and Osiris, born some 4,000 or more years ago--at least 2,000 years before the New Testament Christ. In those days, December 25 was also observed as the birthday of Tammuz the Babylonian god of love and the nativity of Mithra a Persian sun diety also depicted with a brilliant halo of light around his head... Again, Dionysus(the Roman Bacchus), a Greek adaptation of a Afro-Asian savior god commonly associated with the vine, the vineyard and wine, was born December 25. The Greco-Romanized version of Dionysus eventually became a homosexual god of the Europeans whom they delighted in worshipping through a ceremony which consisted of the men coming together, getting sloppy drunk, stripping themselves and each other naked and engaging in

the filthy practice of same gender copulation. When the reprobate ritual was over the men would go home and beat their wives..."

"December 25, as the birthdate of Jesus Christ, was not adopted until 325 C.E.(Christian Era/ A.D.), at the Nicaean Council. In an effort to harmonize and systematize the complex and diverse Christian dogma which existed at that time, a council of three hundred and eighteen bishops met in the city of Nicaea, in the kingdom of Bithynia (today's Turkey) at the mandate of the Roman Emperor Constantine. The date accepted by the majority of the European bishops assembled was not finalized until the publishing of the Philocalian Calendar by the Roman Catholic Church in 354 C.E."

Decorating The Christmas Tree

"...in German history around the 1500s, another legend arose that Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant Reformation started the custom of decorating Christmas trees. According to this legend, Luther placed lighted candles on a fir tree in an attempt to explain to his family how the beautiful night sky affected him. The Christmas tree was imported to England from Germany largely through the influence of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, where it replaced the oak sacred to

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Odin."(Odin was a German god of war)

The Santa Claus Hoax

"The origins of the Santa Claus hoax goes back to the time when in many northern European countries ghosts, witches, trolls, vampires and other demonic creatures were thought to stir abroad on

Christmas Eve. It was on this night that Satan or Santa, the demon/saint(for there was little differentiation between saints and demons in Europe at the time) riding on a jackass or a goat would lead the demons in a merry rivalry as he shared with them the intoxicating substance from his wassahl bowl.

"According to German mythology Santa/Satan first appeared as a hairy imp named Pelz Nichol. In Holland and other European countries the original 'old Nick' another terminology for 'the devil' was depicted as a very stern person who rode across the frozen wastes on the satan's goat and left a whip instead of toys for naughty children. With the coming of European Christianity to the north the demon/saint 'old Nick' evolved into St. Nicholas a bishop of Myra in Turkey, who lived sometime around 300 C.E. He is said to have transported himself on a grey horse or white jackass, an ancient symbol of Typhon, the devil."

AFRIKAN PEOPLE AND EUROPEAN HOLIDAYS
is available through IVth Dynasty
Publishing Company; 8401 Colesville Rd.,
Suite 208A; Silver Spring, MD;20910.

Specify Vol. I or II.

ality. Luther Campbell doesn't appear to be an intellectual giant. But he has enough intelligence to understand that sex sells and is opportunistic enough to ride the proverbial wave of rap popularity to the bank, big time. The question of how much the verbal and visual messages of his raps may be contributing to already high levels of self- and mutual disrespect and contempt among African people is not an important one to him; nor is the question of how artistic his product is. These issues cannot be anywhere near paramount in the agendas of those African entertainers or other "artists" who are essentially hustlers, or businessmen in the American capitalist tradition.

But if Two Live Crew, and countless other musicians, actors, painters, etc. are producing and mass-producing mindless garbage, what does the successful marketing of this garbage say about the American public, African and otherwise? What it says is that we have been so intensively and extensively bombarded with mindless "artistic" products(pop music, soap operas and sit-coms, "starving artist" paintings, and so forth) that many of us actually crave mindlessness in any form.

This society's music, its big-screen and small-screen productions, and other art forms have become a kind of fast-food--easy to prepare, made from mediocre or low-quality ingredients, and marketed to be consumed in a hurry, and with no challenge whatsoever to the consumer. In a society where it is automatically assumed that anything that is faster and easier is necessarily better and where sex is peddled like buckets of some McChickens, it should be no surprise that a group like Two Live Crew is more commercially successful than actual artists such as Wynton Marselis and the late-Art Blakey.

What is crucial in all this is the matter of a people's access to beauty in their lives and their capacity to appreciate beauty. By "beauty" it is

not meant the "beauty" of a new BMW or of some woman's breast by a bra from Frederick's or of some other Madison Avenue-hyped turn-on but that sense of spiritual high one ought to be able to get from a talking-drum solo by Babatunde Olatunji, from an exciting performance by the Dance Theatre of Harlem, or from a brilliant red sunset. It is vital for a people's emotional and psychological health that they be able to have beauty in their lives and be able to appreciate it. It is vital for the collective cultural health of a people that they be able to appreciate beauty from their own cultural outlook and not be forced to accept definitions of "beauty" given to them by outsiders, particularly when those outsiders stand in a position of domination over them.

By allowing America to define "beauty" for us and, in so doing, to drive real beauty from our experience, we are co-signing a warrant for our spiritual death. A spiritually dead people lose their will to live.

-Editor

FALL

Let us not let the sun
Collide with stars.
The fruit shall drop.
Disaster lumps itself on impact,
At the eye's limit,
Dispersing the sky
With clouds vaporous,
A strongbox of severe timing.
Sweet the product,
Like looking into the glass
Of catastrophe.

-Ella Robinson

Back In Time

Art Blakey was born in Pittsburgh in 1919.. Life for many people was simple in those days. If you were lucky you got a job in the coal mines and later the steel mills.

Art Blakey had other ideas. He began to play music around town to escape the life in the mines. He started his career in the Fletcher Henderson swing bad. Then he went on to the Billy Eckstein orchestra...He worked along with Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Thelonius Monk, Miles Davis, Billie Holiday and many of the Be-bop stars of the day.

But Blakey was also a pivotal person in the post-Be Bop or "Cool School." In 1954, he joined with Horace Silver to form the Jazz Messengers, a group Blakey kept together for an astounding 35 years. It was a group which featured--at one time or another--most of the world's top jazz musicians...

As a drummer, Blakey...was very distinctive. He'd experiment with many rhythms in one piece and gradually accelerate his speed and volume creating a thunderous effect that always brought fans to their feet especially in Europe and Africa.

But the world over his greatest contribution to jazz was fostering young talent. Wynton Marselis played with the Blakey band in 1979. Marselis was only 17 years old.

Blakey was a father figure to most of the jazz world because of his maturity and sanity...and many of the musicians that he fostered also have a sanity and maturity because of his influence...

Source: Oct. 20 N.Y. AMSTERDAM NEWS, page 53

Announcements

The Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization will be holding its Kwanzaa observance on December 29 from 5-8 p.m. at the Nebraska State Prison at 14th & Pioneer Blvd. in Lincoln. If you are interested, write to us at P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, NE; 68502-0500. Or call 471-3161 and ask for the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization sponsor at extension 3380. Call between the hours of 12:45 and 2:45, Monday through Friday.

Michael M. Egonu has opened the African Emporium, Inc. at 6311 Ames Ave. in Omaha. According to a flyer promoting the shop, African Emporium offers African clothing, arts, crafts, etc. This marks an opportunity, finally, for African people in Omaha to have easy access to clothing from Africa and climb out of the garb of the European. For more information, call 453-3610 or 453-5400.

The Coalition of African American Cultural Organizations in Philadelphia publishes a very interesting and informative newsletter, as well as an events calendar. To inquire, write: Coalition of African American Cultural Organizations; 1346 No. Broad St.; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 19121.

"The union of Writers of the African Peoples(UWAP) initially formed in 1975 in Dakar, Senegal, was reactivated in Dakar, Senegal on March 21, 1989 at the time of the Annual Conference of the African Literature Association. Membership is open to all African Writers and all Writers of African Descent. Information about membership is available on request." UWAP also publishes a newsletter. Write to: UWAP c/o Forbes Quadrangle 3T01; University of Pittsburgh; Pittsburgh, PA; 15260.